

**Ontario Energy Board**  
P.O. Box 2319  
2300 Yonge Street  
27<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto ON M4P 1E4  
Telephone: 416-481-1967  
Facsimile: 416-440-7656  
Toll free: 1-888-632-6273

**Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario**  
C.P. 2319  
2300, rue Yonge  
27<sup>e</sup> étage  
Toronto ON M4P 1E4  
Téléphone: 416-481-1967  
Télécopieur: 416-440-7656  
Numéro sans frais: 1-888-632-6273



**BY EMAIL AND WEB POSTING**

October 1, 2018

To: Residential Energy Consumers and Consumer Interest Groups  
LEAP and OESP Intake Agencies  
All Licensed Electricity Distributors  
All Rate-Regulated Natural Gas Distributors  
All Licensed Unit Sub-Meter Providers  
All Other Interested Parties

Re: Review of Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)  
**Board File No.: EB-2018-0268**

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As part of the Ontario Energy Board's (OEB) commitment to protect low-income energy consumers and ensure they continue to have access to help when they most need it, the OEB has initiated a review of its Low-Income Energy Assistance Program Emergency Financial Assistance (LEAP EFA).

## **Background**

Electricity distributors, natural gas distributors and unit sub-meter providers have been participating in LEAP EFA since 2012, in partnership with social service agencies. This grant program provides emergency relief to eligible low-income energy consumers who are in arrears and are facing disconnection or have already been disconnected. Each electricity and natural gas distributor is expected to contribute the greater of 0.12% of their total OEB-approved distribution revenue or \$2,000 annually towards LEAP EFA funding.

LEAP EFA provides up to \$500 in emergency assistance for electricity and natural gas bills (\$600 if the home is electrically heated). This one-time emergency financial assistance is paid directly to the utility to help pay arrears and maintain the energy service. Once approved for LEAP EFA, eligible low-income consumers also have access to special customer service rules and low-income energy conservation programs.

LEAP EFA was last reviewed in 2014 but due to the planned implementation of the Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP), only administrative changes to improve LEAP EFA were implemented in 2015. Actions regarding design, funding and delivery elements of the EFA that were identified in the review as potential enhancements were deferred to a later date until the impact the OESP had on LEAP EFA could be reviewed. The OESP has now been operation for about 3 years and over 230,000 eligible households are receiving a monthly credit under the rate reduction program.

## The Scope of the Review

The OEB's review of the LEAP EFA program will evaluate the current program design and delivery processes by assessing the effectiveness of the relationships between utilities, unit sub-meter providers, social agencies and consumers.

The scope will also include a review of the LEAP EFA funding mechanism and levels of consumer participation to better understand how the funding is being managed and whether the current grant amounts are still appropriate. It will also cover reporting requirements.

## Approach

In this review, the OEB intends to evaluate the current LEAP EFA design, delivery and funding with input from consumers, community and social agencies, electricity and natural gas distributors, unit sub-meter providers and other interested parties through:

- Consultations with members of the OEB's Financial Assistance Working Group (FAWG), which consists of representatives from social agencies, low-income advocacy groups and utilities;
- Meetings with a sample of large, medium and small utilities, ones that exhausted their LEAP EFA funds and ones that did not, LEAP social agencies and members of low-income advocacy groups from across Ontario;
- Input from the OEB's province wide Consumer Panel;
- Analysis of LEAP data provided by utilities related to program funds and consumer participation; and
- Review of similar programs and mechanisms in other jurisdictions to determine best practices.

OEB staff will prepare a staff report upon completion of research and engagement activities outlining the results of the review along with recommendations for proposed changes to LEAP EFA, if any. It is expected that the OEB staff report will be posted on the OEB's website for stakeholder comments. Further steps will be determined following review of the comments.

If you have any questions regarding this initiative, please contact Sophie Rousseau, Advisor, at 416-440-8136 or by e-mail to [LEAPreview@oeb.ca](mailto:LEAPreview@oeb.ca).

Yours truly,

*Original Signed By*

Brian Hewson  
Vice President, Consumer Protection & Industry Performance